

News From Nova Scotia

Pumpers and government regulators from a picturesque Canadian province work together to improve onsite systems and protect the environment

When Americans think about Nova Scotia, they envision beautiful windswept coastlines and the kind of untouched, natural wilderness you don't see as much of in the states anymore.

Many of us would perceive life in the Canadian province with slightly less than 1 million citizens and so much oceanfront property as an idyllic setting in which to live and work. Looking at a map of the Eastern Seaboard or browsing tourism photos of the province in a brochure or on the Internet, the state of its septic systems wouldn't come to mind as an issue of concern.

Don't let the beautiful landscapes of the rustic province fool you. Nova Scotia — a 120- by 480-mile peninsula attached to New Brunswick by a few kilometers — has the same concerns about improving onsite sanitation systems as contractors in most regions of the U.S., according to a contingent of Canadian pumpers who attended the 2006 Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo in Nashville.

Pumper Interview

By Jim Kneiszel

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The group of Nova Scotia pumpers who attend the Expo regularly, including mainstay Allan Baird of Baird Septic Tank Pumping, were honored to be joined by several dignitaries this year. Among the provincial officials who were wowed by the technology they saw at the Expo were Provincial Cabinet member Kerry Morash, the minister of Environment and Labour, and Robert Anderson, planning and development officer for the Environment and Labour Department, the main government liaison to about 65 pumpers who serve Nova Scotia.

With so many leaders in the liquid waste industry visiting the Expo, *Pumper*® took the opportunity to learn more about the state of onsite system maintenance in the scenic province. Baird, who heads the Septic Pumpers Association of Nova Scotia, Morash and Anderson paused in their search for new onsite sanitation technology to fill the rest of us in on pumping in Nova Scotia:

Pumper: Why do you make the trip to America's mid-South for the Pumper & Cleaner Expo?

Baird: This is my 22nd or 23rd time at the Expo

and I like to learn the new technologies. Education Day is a very good day at the Pumper Show to see new ideas and see what's happening in other countries. The new technology we see here today, we'll see in Canada in five years. If I want to be a leader in the industry, I'm going to be here.

Pumper: Why have you strongly encouraged provincial officials to come along?

Baird: We've worked closely with the Department of Environment in rules and regulations for pumpers, and it's only in the past five years since we've formed a trade association that we've had a good relationship with the minister of environment. This is the first time that a minister of environment from Canada has attended a convention like this, and we're proud that we've been able to get him to come here. I can't speak for the minister, but I'm quite confident he'll send another contingent down here next year.

Pumper: What are a few concerns of pumpers working in a relatively desolate province like Nova Scotia?

Baird: It is very, very rural and we have a lot of people who are not educated yet on the care and maintenance of septic systems. As a pumper, the more I try to educate customers on systems, the more they think I'm trying to make an extra dollar. That's partially true, but we want to implement an educational program working with the department. If they implement an educational program, the information is coming from a neutral party and the homeowner can buy into the concept more easily.

Pumper: Disposal seems to be an issue of growing concern all over. What about Nova Scotia?

Baird: It's getting to be a bigger and bigger problem, and we are looking more into dewatering equipment. How do we pump a septic tank and then extract the water from it and have the pure sludge to dispose of? I am one of three pumpers experimenting with new technologies. We've been to Norway to look at a dewatering system where you put the effluent back



Allan Baird



Kerry Morash



Robert Anderson

into the septic tank and take the pure sludge away.

Pumper: From the perspective of a Cabinet minister, what do you view as the major challenges of handling the waste stream?

Morash: We have the same problems everyone else does. There is aging infrastructure where new systems need to be installed. In the metro areas,

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Kerry Morash

we're upgrading facilities that are long overdue. The coastal region's history is that if you can pump it out into the ocean and the tide takes it away twice a day, well, then you don't have to worry about it. Fortunately, that mentality has changed, and now we're trying to make sure we do everything properly and protect the environment.

Pumper: How does that new attitude transfer over to the private, onsite sanitation systems?

Morash: Forty-five percent of Nova Scotia is serviced by onsite systems, and it's a growing thing, contrary to how the urban planners in the metro areas thought we would grow (sewage services). People want space between themselves and their



The entire crew from Nova Scotia meeting for breakfast at the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo International in February. (Photo by Jim Kneiszel)

neighbors, so more onsite systems will be needed in the future. A well-maintained system works for a long time, will take care of the environment and be cost-effective.

Pumper: How has the relationship between pumping contractors and the government regulators changed over the years?

Morash: I think (pumpers) want to accentuate the professionalism because they are regulated now. There was a time when they weren't regulated much and problems and issues arose. We're working with everybody to make sure we can get the level of professionalism up and make sure the training and qualifications are there. They're quite keen in their intent to do training themselves.

Pumper: Explain the interest you've seen among Nova Scotia pumpers to improve the industry.

Anderson: We're in the process of writing a new set of onsite sewage disposal guidelines, and working with the industry; this is something they really wanted. We're developing qualifications for pumpers. They want to see a level playing field as much as the department wants to see a level playing field. It enhances the professionalism of the industry. The next thing we'll focus on is educating the homeowner and taking that approach. Most times the homeowners don't know what a septic system is, and a lot of times they don't know where it is. So the majority of our work is going to be on education for the foreseeable future.

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Pumper: Working with the Provincial Government, what's one initiative you'd like to see succeed?

Baird: One thing we'd like to see is mandatory pumping. It's a bad word, but we're looking at a pre-paid pumping program, a municipal program, and it would be put on your property taxes. If we can get our government to implement a regulation that you must have your tank pumped every three or four years (a pilot program to do just that is being considered for a town in Cape Breton), it would be a big improvement for us as pumpers, and it would be good for the environment. A properly designed and installed onsite system will last indefinitely. But I run into neglected jobs where the customer is as proud as can be that it's been 25 years since their

tank was pumped, and I'd know right off that their system is going to be failing if it isn't already.

Pumper: How about the future for pumpers and regulators in Nova Scotia? Do you see major challenges?

Anderson: I'm proud to say we have a very good working relationship with our industry. I talk to the president of our industry association, sometimes on a daily basis. We've been able to make (regulations) more manageable for them, but yet still achieve goals we're mandated to do. They are professional in what they do, but the homeowner or the consumer doesn't see it that way. That's part of the public education process as well. ■

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